

REMARKS TO THE PRESS

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GENERAL PETRAEUS: "Dobriy Vecer, Spasibo, Rahmat, Kak dela?" (Good evening, thank you, how are you?)

(Laughter)

And thank you all for gathering for this press conference. I've had a wonderful first visit to your country over the last couple of days. It has been "ochen' priyatno" (very pleasant) and today, what I'd like to do is give a brief statement about what we've done over the past couple of days and then take a few questions with priority going to the local press.

We arrived on Saturday night, had a good visit with our troopers out at Manas Air Base. Very impressive facility. Yesterday we were able to see some of your country's extraordinary natural beauty. We had a several-hour hike at the nature preserve at Ala-Archa and an excellent lunch in a yurt. The ambassador was seen drinking vodka in a yurt. (Laughter)

GENERAL PETRAEUS: Actually, that's not true, but some other people were [drinking vodka].

And we had a lovely dinner at her house last night, as well, and in fact, it was local food. And today we've had a series of meetings, plus a lunch at which one of your local fashion designers was present, a painter, an intellectual, and a writer. I was also honored to place a wreath at one of your local monuments, and I'll talk more about that later, and to place a coin, a medallion - one of my medallions, at the monument to your famous ballerina. I'm in your country as part of a long-planned trip to the Central Asian states to discuss issues of security cooperation with the states in this region and especially against our common enemy of extremism. I believe we all share a major common interest in preserving and strengthening stability and security here in Central Asia. In pursuit of this goal, we have sought to deepen the cooperation with your country and with other partners in the region and beyond, even including other countries, such as Russia and China. And in each country I have noted that we share a common interest in the success of the international effort to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan and to counter extremism and the flow of international narcotics. In particular, I think no one wants to see extremism triumph in Afghanistan and spread to other countries in the region.

We respect your country's commitment in the fight against extremism and recognize the sacrifices you have made in this common struggle. And today with your Deputy Minister of Defense, I had the honor of laying a wreath at the monument to the Kyrgyz heroes who gave

their lives in the fight against extremism in August 1999 in Batken. We remembered and honored their sacrifice as we remembered and honored the sacrifice of all those who have fallen in the fight against extremism. We met today with the Minister of Defense and your senior military, with the Prime Minister, and with the Chief Foreign Policy Advisor to the President and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

In each meeting, we began with a discussion of the situation in Iraq. As you may know, I left Iraq several months ago, after having spent nearly four years there in different capacities, ending up as the Commander of the Multinational Force in Iraq for over nineteen months. I noted the significant progress in Iraq over the course of the last two years, with the level of attacks being reduced from 180 per day in June of 2007 to about 10 attacks per day over the past few months. I noted that while the presence of Al Qaeda and its extremist allies, and the Shi'ia militia and other extremists has been reduced substantially, there still are extremist elements in Iraq and there still are challenges. But the reduction in violence, the improvement in the security situation, and the growth of the Iraqi security forces have enabled us to reduce, for example, the U.S. combat brigades in Iraq from twenty at the height of the surge to fourteen, with other reductions possible in the months ahead.

We then discussed the situation in Afghanistan, where over the course of the past year, in particular, the security situation has gotten worse. I noted that, for example, the level of attacks has gone up by some forty or so percent from 2007 to 2008. The security situation in the eastern and southern parts of Afghanistan, in particular, has deteriorated, and the commander on the ground has requested additional forces. There have, indeed, been significant areas of progress in Afghanistan, in the construction of schools, of medical facilities, of communications and telecommunications infrastructure, the agreement on a constitution, elections, and so forth, but the security situation has gotten worse, and it is necessary to take actions to arrest the downward spiral and begin to improve that situation. And I discussed the announcements by the U.S. Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs about the deployment of some 30,000 additional U.S. forces, the expansion of the Afghan National Army, and the possible deployment of additional other NATO forces as well. Manas Air Base plays an important role in the deployment of these forces, being a location through which our soldiers flow, and through which the soldiers of France and Spain flow as well, on their way to and from Afghanistan. It's also an important base for refueling aircraft, and I discussed how it fits into the overall logistics structure that is important to supporting the forces in Afghanistan from the north, as part of what we call the northern distribution network, which supplements the main line of communication, of logistical resupply, that runs through Pakistan and the Khyber Pass. In the development of the northern distribution network, my visit has been important because we have successfully established agreements for the transit of various commercial goods and services through a number of neighbors, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Russia, and, of course, through Manas Air Base.

Our meetings today did focus a good bit on Manas and the important role that it plays, and I think the meetings can be characterized as having been quite constructive and also quite reassuring as to the future partnership that revolves around Manas Air Base. We also discussed the assistance that the United States provides, both direct and indirect, it adds up to about 150 million dollars per year in various programs, some 63 million of which is connected to Manas. Included in that 63 million are fees for the lease of the space at Manas, fees paid to the airport, and also money for contracts to local companies and individuals, noting that over 320 Kyrgyz citizens are employed at that base. We also discussed the programs in which we support Kyrgyz counter-terrorist, counter-narcotics and military forces to about \$25 million per year as well. I noted our desire to increase the benefits that accrue to your country from Manas and the other activities, and we'll be sending a team of senior officers here in February to discuss in concrete ways various programs that we can undertake. I was asked by the Prime Minister about the case in which a Kyrgyz citizen was shot and killed by one of our troopers at the base, and I noted that the investigation into that case has been reopened and that I would brief him when the findings and actions are complete.

A constant theme in all of our discussions was that all countries, again, face a common threat in extremism and all countries should work together to help the endeavor in Afghanistan achieve progress, in providing assistance to countries like Kyrgyzstan, that indeed, the partnership should be one in which there is mutual cooperation of *all* involved who have a stake in the fight against extremism. Again, these common interests are shared, not just by the Central Asian states, the countries engaged in the effort in Afghanistan, but also, other countries of the region, including China and Russia and others, and indeed, all freedom-loving people of the world.

As you know, tomorrow my country will inaugurate a new president. Every such inauguration marks a new beginning. And it is my hope, and the hope of my partners here in this country, that that new beginning will be followed by strengthened relationships and partnerships between the United States and the people and government of your country. And it is our hope, as well, that that partnership and cooperation can be extended to all countries who, again, stand together in the effort to counter extremism. And now I'd be happy to take a few questions.

QUESTION: Rina Kindjeeva, local Information Agency Akipress. Lately, there have been reports that the Kyrgyz government might close Manas Air Base. Did you discuss such possibilities during your meetings with Kyrgyz officials?

GENERAL PETRAEUS: We did not discuss such possibilities at all. We did discuss the news reports of that item, and each governmental official with whom I met noted that the source of that story was not your government, it was one press source from another country that has been repeated by other newspapers and media, and that there is no foundation to it. In fact, one of your most senior officials noted that in discussions with Russia over economic cooperation the subject of Manas did not come up, and this is why I was able to say in my comments that our

conversations were quite reassuring as to the future of Manas and the future of those people who benefit from it.

So, we would say in my country that that story – your governmental officials told us that that story was without foundation, so I would say "rahmat" (thank you) for that question.

QUESTION: Vadim Nochevkin, local newspaper "Delo Nomer." It's not the first time that there has been speculation about the Kyrgyz Government's intent to close Manas Air Base, and each time it is the Pentagon and State Department officials who deny the rumors, but the Government of Kyrgyzstan does not deny the rumors. They deny the rumors to you but they are silent to us. Why do you think that is so?

GENERAL PETRAEUS: With respect to "gopodin" (mister) journalist, obviously that's a question for other individuals. I did ask if I could report what I reported to you, and I asked that of your senior governmental officials, and I was told that I could, in fact, report what I did. It could be that there's a little bit of Central Asia negotiating going on here through the press, and that's okay.

MODERATOR: Unfortunately, we only have time for one more question.

QUESTION: Sergey Kozhemjakin, local newspaper "Beliy Parus." You, Mr. General, are partly responsible for those bloody crimes which America commits in Haiti, Iraq, Afghanistan – that is, in all the countries you have served. Your visit is an insult is an insult to Kyrgyzstan. The question is, when will America stop interfering in the affairs of other questions, including Kyrgyzstan?

GENERAL PETRAEUS: I think it's probably interesting to look at the situation in Afghanistan, actually, and to realize that over eighty percent of the civilian casualties in Afghanistan, for example, are caused by actions of extremists who carry out indiscriminate acts of violence. In other words, they kill whoever is in the path of their suicide bombing or improvised explosive device attack. They do this because they do not tolerate others who want to live their lives in a different way. It is these individuals, of course, who harbor transnational extremists, and by that I mean extremists who have taken actions outside the borders of the country in which they were located; extremists who attacked in your country, in Kyrgyzstan; extremists who have carried out, of course, attacks in my country; who have carried out attacks in various Western countries; in the Gulf States, in Saudi Arabia, in many countries around the world. Again, this term is used very carefully, the term "extremist," because they believe in an extreme ideology, one that does not accept that others can act or believe differently than they do. In Iraq, it was the actions of the extremists that ultimately turned the people against them, it was the indiscriminate violence, it was acts of oppression – forced marriages, cutting fingers off people who smoked – and if you are perhaps defending them, then, obviously, that would be worthy of quite a serious discussion. But those are the forces that the coalition of nations, with the United Nations Security Council resolution authorizing, have sought to counter in

Afghanistan. That is the kind of extremism that your soldiers died fighting in 1999. And that is what we have sought to support – the coalition, the partnership of countries who do not want to see that extremism spread into their countries, to cross their boundaries, who also want to counter the flow of illegal narcotics and other such activities. That is our goal – it is, again, authorized by the United National Security Council, and I believe that it is very much in your country's interest to see the endeavor in Afghanistan make progress so that the extremism there does not spread to your country.

Thank you all very much for this opportunity, and I look forward to meeting with you again, when I visit again. I've been very impressed by the scenic beauty here and the warmth of hospitality here, and I want to thank you all for that. And I look forward to increased partnership and cooperation and the new President is inaugurated in Washington tomorrow. Thank you very much. Spasibo, Rahmat, and Do-vidaniya! (Thank you, thank you, goodbye!)

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